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ABSTRACT

This paper suggests the need for a research-validated framework to help preservice and inservice teachers and higher education faculty understand fundamental learner needs that must be met in any setting and any reform effort. It describes a learner-centered framework based on the research-validated "Learner-Centered Psychological Principles" (APA, 1997) and associated tools that can provide a seamless professional development model for linking K-16 teachers. It discusses the role of learner-centered principles and practices in school reform (characteristics and dispositions of learner-centered teachers, characteristics of learner-centered practices, sharing power and control with learners, and building positive personal relations and meaningful connections). The paper offers evidence of the effectiveness of this framework in urban schools. Implications for social and educational policy are noted (e.g., policies must emphasize new leadership roles through the use of strategies that empower members of underrepresented minority groups to take increased control of their learning and development, and policies must emphasize the value of diversity throughout the educational system). A proposed research agenda focuses on strategies that give greater voice to all students at all educational levels. (Contains 52 references.) (SM)

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Preparing Teachers to Meet the Needs of Diverse Learners in Urban Schools:

The Learner-Centered Framework

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Abstract

Preparing teachers for meeting the complex and changing needs of an increasingly diverse student population is a challenge in and of itself. When issues of meeting these needs with inner city, urban children and youth are added, the challenge increases in immeasurable ways. To address these challenges, a research-validated framework is needed that can help both pre- and in-service teachers – as well as the higher education faculty responsible for much of their professional development – understand the fundamental learner needs that must be met in any setting and in any reform effort. This presentation focuses on describing a learner-centered framework based on the research-validated *Learner-Centered Psychological Principles* (APA, 1997) and associated tools that can provide a seamless professional development model for linking pK-16 teachers. Evidence of the effectiveness of this framework in urban school settings will be presented and recommendations for policy, research, and practice provided.

Serving the learning needs of today's youth presents numerous challenges to educators. This is particularly true for those teachers working with students in inner city urban schools. The challenges primarily derive from the diverse academic and non-academic needs of the students and the demands being placed on teachers, administrators, and schools to meet high academic standards and accountability demands related to student achievement. Preparing teachers to effectively meet these challenges in programs that are, themselves, being subjected to increasing accountability and academic/professional standards has become increasingly difficult.

To address these issues, a number of solutions have been suggested. These solutions range from professional development schools that link preservice teachers with practicing teachers who serve as mentors, to exposing developing teachers to a variety of technology tools for serving the needs of urban children, to forming communities of practice that link new and experienced teachers. Although each of these approaches can be helpful, our research has shown that what is particularly important is a deep understanding of research-validated learner-centered psychological principles and practices. We have learned from our research that these learner-centered principles and practices lead to enhanced student motivation and achievement at all levels of the educational system.

My purpose in this presentation is to describe the learner-centered principles, the framework that is derived from these principles, and what we have learned from our research both in teacher preparation and urban schools. I will conclude with recommendations for research, practice, and policy.

The Research-Validated Learner-Centered Principles

Beginning in 1990, the American Psychological Association (APA) appointed a special Task Force on Psychology in Education, one of whose purposes was to integrate research and theory from psychology and education in order to surface general principles that have stood the

test of time and can provide a framework for school redesign and reform. The result was a document that originally specified twelve fundamental principles about learners and learning that, taken together, provide an integrated perspective on factors influencing learning for *all* learners (APA, 1993). This document was revised in 1997 (APA, 1997) and now includes 14 principles that are essentially the same as the original 12 principles except that attention is now given to principles dealing with diversity and standards. [Note to readers: Those interested in research support for the *Principles* are referred to the research and theory reviewed in developing the *Principles*, described in McCombs and Whisler (1997). Further research support is also provided in Alexander and Murphy (1998) and Lambert and McCombs (1998)].

The 14 learner-centered principles are categorized into four domains as shown in Table 1. These categories group the principles into research-validated domains important to learning: metacognitive and cognitive factors, affective and motivational factors, developmental and social factors, and individual difference factors. An understanding of these domains and the principles within them establishes a framework for designing learner-centered practices at all levels of schooling. It also defines what "learner-centered" means from a research-validated perspective.

A central understanding that emerges from an integrated and holistic look at the 14 APA *Principles* is that for educational systems to serve the needs of *all learners*, there must be a focus on the individual learner as well as an understanding of the teaching and learning process (cf. McCombs & Whisler, 1997).

> *"Learner centered" is the perspective that couples a focus on individual learners -- their heredity, experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, talents, interests, capacities, and needs -- with a focus on learning -- the best available knowledge about learning and how it occurs and about teaching practices that are most effective in promoting the highest levels of motivation, learning, and achievement for all learners. This dual*

focus then informs and drives educational decision making. Learner-centered is a reflection in practice of the Learner-Centered Psychological Principles -- in the programs, practices, policies, and people that support learning for all.

This definition of learner-centered is thus based on an understanding of the *Learner-Centered Psychological Principles* (APA, 1997) as a representation of the current knowledge base on learners and learning.

The Role of Learner-Centered Principles and Practices in School Reform

Research confirms that a focus on personal and motivational outcomes balanced with a focus on high achievement and challenging standards are vital in today's schools if we are to address current concerns about both increasing student achievement and reducing negative trends such as school dropout, peer bullying, and violence. Without a focus on individual learners and research-validated principles of learning in the larger context of our changing social, technological, and cultural systems, we run the risk of deepening the broken bonds between adults and youth and increasing feelings of distrust. We also run the risk of failing to adequately prepare our children and youth for our changing world and new kinds of learning and knowledge production that will be required. This is particularly true for inner-city urban youth.

With a person-centered approach to educational reform, the focus is on psychological, emotional, and social needs of learners and interventions that maximize healthy functioning such that motivation, learning, and achievement are promoted for *all* learners. The research-validated *Learner Centered Psychological Principles* (APA, 1993, 1997) provide a knowledge base for understanding that learning and motivation are natural processes that occur when the *conditions and context* of learning are supportive of individual learner needs, capacities, experiences, and interests. The foundation of the research-validated principles is also essential to designing

learner-centered programs and practices that attend holistically and systemically to the needs of all learners, including the teachers as they move from new to experienced in the K-16 system.

Thus, the *Principles* apply to all learners, in and outside of school, young and old. Learner-centered is also related to the beliefs, characteristics, dispositions, and practices of teachers – practices primarily created by the teacher throughout grades K-16. When teachers and their practices function from an understanding of the knowledge base delineated in the *Principles*, they (a) include learners in decisions about how and what they learn and how that learning is assessed; (b) take seriously each learner's unique perspectives; (c) respect and accommodate individual differences in learners' backgrounds, interests, abilities, and experiences; and (d) treat learners as co-creators and partners in the teaching and learning process. Thus, we next examine what "learner-centered" means in terms of characteristics and dispositions of teachers, followed by what it means in terms of instructional practices.

Characteristics and Dispositions of Learner-Centered Teachers

In addition to having certain beliefs about learners and learning, research shows that learner-centered teachers tend to have some general characteristics and dispositions in common. McKeachie (1995) talks about what makes a good teacher great. What he calls great teachers includes characteristics and dispositions that can be considered "learner-centered." Student ratings show that the best teachers demonstrate interest in their subject, a sense of humor, a sympathetic attitude toward students, and fairness in grading. Students believe that great teachers: present material in interesting ways, stimulate intellectual curiosity, give clear explanations, are skillful in observing student reactions, are friendly, and provide clear structure and organization to the materials presented. Great teachers give quality feedback, are available and helpful, are fair, have a concern for students, are enthusiastic about their subject matter and teaching, organize materials and information, and give clear explanations. In addition, Combs

(1986) reported 13 studies that clearly revealed that the common qualities of effective helpers are "... a direct outcome of the helper's perceptual organization or belief system. It is what the helper believes that makes the difference" (p. 55).

Interestingly, many of the characteristics and dispositions that define learner-centered teachers are similar or identical to those that describe *expert* teachers as well. For example, in a study aimed at differentiating between expert and experienced teachers, Henry (1994) identifies the following traits of an expert teacher: content knowledge, ability to work with all students, nurturing, risk-taking, respectful, interested in individual student needs, participates in continuing professional growth, self-confident and reflective, adjusts the context to learners, slow to close the learning process, makes multiple concept connections, enthusiastic, uses teachable moments, uses a variety of strategies, and acknowledges own lack of knowledge. Findings from Henry's comparison of experienced (16 or more years of experience) and expert (an average of 20 years of experience that met the criteria stated above) teachers reveal that expert teachers are more concerned with student enjoyment while learning and with the compatibility of the instruction to their own philosophy and experiences of success. Expert teachers' decision making process is centered in the self, i.e., is compatible with values and beliefs about role as teacher, is directed by personal feelings of competence, and is primarily student-centered (concerned with how instructional practice will motivate students and enhance student understanding and enjoyment).

Bernieri (1991) studied the relationship between student achievement and teachers' interpersonal sensitivity in teaching interactions and found a cluster of teacher qualities to be strongly related to learning. Again, much of what was found aligns with learner-centered teacher qualities and beliefs. The cluster includes seeing things from the student's perspective, being genuinely interested in and concerned for students, being person oriented and involving,

displaying responsibility, and valuing order. Similarly, Helmke and Schrader (1991) found that classes in which students both learned the most and had the highest positive attitudes toward themselves (their self-concept of ability) and toward learning had teachers characterized as (a) sensitive to and tolerant of and patient with student differences in learning ability; (b) adaptive to individual differences in their instructional approach; (c) task-oriented and focused while also presenting content in clear, interesting, and involving ways; (d) attentive to affective climate and to using praise and humor; and (e) making sure students are comprehending what is presented.

Teacher qualities, then, define one dimension of "learner-centeredness." Another critical dimension involves the characteristics of instructional practices.

Characteristics of Learner-Centered Practices

Learner-centered practices are characterized as those that attend to the knowledge base and research on both learners and learning. When the focus is on only the research on learning (without also considering what we know about individual learners), the system can get out of balance. For example, reliance on only learning research has resulted in a growing emphasis on high standards, thematic and integrated curricula, instructional practices that help learners – teachers and students alike – take a more active and responsible role in directing their own learning, and assessment methods that focus not only on what learners know but what they can do to demonstrate and apply that knowledge in real-life or life-like settings. These technical changes (i.e., domains of educational systems design that are concerned with standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment) and organizational changes (management structures and policies) have occurred in response to what we now know about how learning best occurs. However, the research demonstrates (cf., Fullan, 1996; Joyce & Calhoun, 1995) that technical and organizational changes are not sufficient because they often downplay the role of the learner

and learning environment. They rarely focus on, or provide, effective strategies for off-setting the problems of alienation, lack of engagement, fear of failure, or stress and overwhelm.

Sharing Power and Control with Learners

Sharing power and control with learners certainly addresses learner needs and the personal domain. It is a learner-centered practice that results in increased motivation, learning, and achievement. When learners of any age are empowered and feel ownership of their own learning, by virtue of having a voice and choice, *they are more willing to learn and be involved in their own learning.* When learning experiences are consistent with this research-based practice, the learning process is "honored" with opportunities for choice in meeting individual needs and making personal connections with prior and new knowledge.

Vatterott (1995) points out that although teachers are often held responsible for student learning, *it is the student who makes the decision to learn.* Teachers *cannot make learning happen*; they can encourage and persuade with a variety of incentives. But teachers know only too well that many incentives (e.g., grades, fear of discipline) work only for some students. Further, when teachers try to overly control the learning process or get students to take responsibility within the teacher's parameters and by the teacher's rules, they may get obedience or compliance, but they won't get responsibility.

Responsibility begins with making choices. Without the opportunity to choose, to make decisions, and to face the consequences of those decisions, there is no sense of ownership. A sense of ownership, resulting from choices, is empowering. Without a sense of empowerment and ownership there is no responsibility or accountability – there is blaming and compliance. With ownership, learning is more fun and exciting for both students and teachers, and both share in the pleasures and responsibilities of control. Teachers and students share both responsibility and power – a key feature of learner-centered practices that address the personal domain.

Simply put, it is in the nature of human beings to strive for control and autonomy, to feel they are masters of their own destinies (cf. Deci & Ryan, 1991; Ryan, 1992, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000). When opportunities are provided to meet this innate need within the personal domain, the natural response is to feel empowered with a sense of ownership and responsibility. In a nutshell, *we own what we create* and new instructional models are increasingly recognizing this implication of the learner-centered principles. For example, Glasser's (1990, 1994) Quality School model is based on the assumption that children must make the choices and take responsibility for their own learning and performance evaluations. Further, DuFour (1999) describes guidelines for school principals and administrators that emphasize less command and control and more shared leadership and decision making.

Building Positive Personal Relations and Meaningful Connections

The Learner-Centered Model (McCombs, 1997, 1998, 2000; McCombs & Whisler, 1997) shown in Figure 1 provides a research-validated, principle-based framework for both sharing power and control with students and for building the positive relationships and connections essential to high motivation and achievement. Unlike many programs currently being implemented, however, the Learner-Centered Model provides an overall framework for aligning practices such that they are comprehensive, systemic, and consistent with current research and the APA *Principles*. As such, then, this is a meta-model for designing, implementing, and evaluating programs and practices at all levels of the educational system – from classroom to school to community levels and from a look at personal beliefs to practices to expected outcomes. The model builds on self-assessment and reflection tools for K-16 teachers (the Assessment of Learner-Centered Practices, ALCP) in the form of surveys for teachers, students, and administrators, and combines aspects of these approaches (McCombs & Lauer, 1997, 1998; McCombs & Whisler, 1997). However, the focus, is on identifying teacher beliefs and

discrepancies between teacher and student perspectives of practices that can enhance student motivation and achievement – as a tool to assist teachers reflect on and change practices as well as identify personalized staff development needs.

Insert Figure 1 about here

The overall model (see Figure 1) of the relationships between teacher beliefs and perceptions of their classroom practices and how this influences student perceptions of these practices has been shown to lead the identification of those domains of classroom practice that are most predictive of positive outcomes (McCombs, 1998, 1999a; McCombs & Lauer, 1997; McCombs & Quiat, 1999) for students from kindergarten through college age (Daniels, Kalkman, & McCombs, 2001; Lauer, McCombs, & Pierce, 1998; McCombs & Lauer, 1998; Perry, 1998; Perry, Donohue, & Weinstein, 1999; Perry & Weinstein, 1998). At every age level, the domain of classroom practice found to be most important to students' positive motivation, learning, and achievement is that of creating positive personal relationships and a caring classroom climate. For students in the K-12 age range, other domains of practice important to high motivation and achievement are those that (a) honor student voice, including practices that academically challenge each student and encourage students to engage in perspective taking strategies that honor and respect diverse views; (b) support students' development of higher-order thinking, problem-solving, and self-regulated learning skills; and (c) adapt to a range of individual differences in development, culture, and other background and learning differences.

Our research (McCombs & Lauer, 1997, 1998; McCombs & Quiat, 1999, in press; McCombs & Whisler, 1997; Weinberger & McCombs, 2001) looked at the impact of teacher beliefs on their perceptions of their classroom practices as well as how teacher perceptions of

practice differ from student perceptions of these practices. In a large-scale study of teachers and students we confirmed our hypothesis about the importance – for student motivation, learning, and achievement – of those beliefs and practices that are consistent with the research on learners and learning. We also found that teachers who are more learner-centered are both more successful in engaging all students in an effective learning process, and are, themselves, more effective learners and happier with their jobs. Furthermore, teachers report that the process of self-assessment and reflection – particularly about discrepancies between their own and their individual students' experiences of classroom practices – helps them identify areas in which they might change their practices to be more effective in reaching more students. This is an important finding that relates to the "how" of transformation. That is, by helping teachers and others engage in a process of self-assessment and reflection – particularly about the impact of their beliefs and practices on individual students and their learning and motivation – a respectful and non-judgmental impetus to change is provided. Combining the opportunity for teacher self-assessment of and reflection on their beliefs and practices (and the impact of these practices on individual students) with skill training and conversations and dialogue about how to create learner-centered K-16 schools and classrooms can help make the transformation complete.

Our research also revealed that teachers were not absolutely learner-centered or completely non learner-centered. Different learner-centered teachers had different but overlapping beliefs. At the same time, however, specific *beliefs or teaching practices* could be classified as learner-centered (likely to enhance motivation, learning, and success) or non learner-centered (likely to hinder motivation, learning, and success). Learner-centered teachers are defined as those that have more beliefs and practices classified as learner-centered than as non learner-centered. For example, *believing all students learn* is quite different *from believing that some students cannot learn*, the former being learner-centered and the latter being non

learner-centered. Learner-centered teachers see each student as unique and capable of learning, have a perspective that focuses on the learner knowing that this promotes learning, understand basic principles defining learners and learning, and honor and accept the student's point of view (McCombs & Lauer, 1997, 1998; McCombs & Quiat, 1999). As a result, the student's natural inclinations to learn, master the environment, and grow in positive ways are enhanced.

Results of our research with the ALCP teacher and student surveys at both the secondary and postsecondary levels have confirmed that (a) student perceptions of their teacher's instructional practices are significantly related to their motivation, learning, and achievement; (b) teacher perceptions of instructional practices are not significantly related to student motivation and achievement; and (c) student perceptions of a positive learning environment and relationship with the teacher are the most important practices for enhancing student motivation and achievement. Unlike the results with middle and high school students, however, results with undergraduate and graduate students and their instructors revealed five rather than four domains of practice important to motivation and achievement: (1) establishes positive interpersonal relationships, (2) facilitates the learning process, (3) adapts to student learning needs, (4) encourages personal challenge and responsibility for learning; and (5) provides for social learning needs. Thus, at all levels of our educational system, teachers and instructors can be helped to improve instructional practices and change toward more learner-centered practices by attending to what students are perceiving and spending more time creating positive climates and relationships – critical connections so important to personal and system learning and change.

Research Evidence in Support of Learner-Centered Practices for Urban Students

Two areas of our research are most relevant to the theme of urban school reform that links grades pK-16. First, we have used our Assessment of Learner-Centered Practices (ALCP)

surveys with innovative teacher preparation programs; second, we have used these surveys with teachers in K-12 inner city, predominantly Title I environments.

Seamless Professional Development

In the first area, we have been working with a number of teacher preparation programs and institutions of higher education to increase their understanding of the Learner-Centered Framework, including its principles and practices. For example, we have been working for three years with the University of North Florida in Jacksonville. The university has developed a model for urban elementary professional development schools that includes the characteristics of most such initiatives: focus on student learning, teacher preparation for preintern and intern teachers; professional development of PreK-12 and university faculty; and research and inquiry. The university's model, however, goes beyond those of many other institutions by focusing its efforts on urban education. A major thrust of the program has been to analyze the learner-centeredness of intern teachers at the professional development schools and to compare them with practicing teachers and beginning students on the several dimensions of learner-centeredness as defined by McCombs and Whisler (1997).

General findings from this first area of research (cf., Buckley-VanHoek, Kasten, & O'Farrell, 2001; Lauer, McCombs, & Pierce, 1999; McCombs, 1999) include that (a) intern teachers have high learner-centered beliefs and perceive themselves as implementing learner-centered practices, but progressively less so at the K-3, 4-5, or 6-12 grade levels; (b) intern teachers are less learner-centered in their beliefs than beginning students but higher than practicing teachers; (c) intern teachers have much higher beliefs in the need to control student learning as they work with students in the higher grades; and (d) the students of intern teachers do not report perceiving them to engage in high levels of learner-centered practices at any grade level in the two domains most important for motivation and achievement, i.e., establishing

positive relationships and honoring student voice. On the more positive side, however, the more learner-centered interns are perceived to be, the higher the motivation and achievement of their students at all grade levels.

Licklider (1997) suggests a model of continuing professional development in which teachers take responsibility for their own growth and learning. She sees professional development as a person-centered model based on participant needs, and structured in ways that encourage inquiry, collaboration with others, and opportunities for mentoring and practice. In our work with the APA's *Learner-Centered Psychological Principles* and their application to teacher education, we believe this model applies to both teacher preparation programs and higher education faculty (Lambert & McCombs, 1998; McCombs & Whisler, 1997). The process needs to begin with teachers articulating their beliefs and assumptions and building an awareness of the need for change, followed by the modeling of effective strategies, and then the application of these strategies with the support of mentors and the larger learning community. Finally, teachers' experience and expertise needs to be honored and opportunities for them to form meaningful professional relationships with diverse faculty that help foster teacher's connections to new perspectives and ways of thinking needs to be provided in an ongoing learning process.

Our work has continued to refine and facilitate the implementation of tools that can assist K-16 educators build a seamless professional development system for pre through inservice teachers. This seamless system has the goal to promote ongoing, personalized professional development (McCombs & Lauer, 1998; McCombs & Whisler, 1997). To create a "seamless" ongoing K-16 professional development process, however, a number of issues must be addressed. For example, collaborative relationships between schools and universities must be established on common philosophical and empirical views. There must be a reciprocal valuing of research knowledge and concepts such as seeing both teachers and students as learners. Other

issues include the role of learner-centered practices in higher education, what it takes to transform current thinking and practices, how to maintain valued traditions while honoring continuous learning and change, and what learner-centered means in practice in higher education in general and teacher preparation programs in particular.

Meeting the Needs of Inner-City Learners

In our second area of research (cf. Daniels, Kalkman, & McCombs, 2001; McCombs & Quiat, 2000; Perry, 1998; Perry, Donohue, & Weinstein, 2000) we have collected data on over 1,200 K-3 students, 1,700 Grade 4-5 students, and 2,500 Grade 6-8 students in predominantly high minority, inner-city, Title I schools. We again see the pattern of decreasing learner-centeredness as perceived by both students and teachers at the higher grades, as well as increased beliefs by teachers that they must maintain high levels of control rather than support student autonomy and choice. Significantly higher proportions of teachers are perceived as low learner-centered in the higher as compared to lower grades. Students in classes they perceive as non learner-centered have significantly lower motivation and achievement than students in classes they perceive as learner-centered. When we look at differences in students in different ethnic and racial groups, Hispanic as compared to African American, Caucasian, and Asian students report perceiving lower levels of learner-centered practices by the time they are in upper elementary grades. Differences between the groups were relatively small through grade 3, but began to increase by grade 4 and become significantly different by grade 6. Hispanic students in our sample also report lower motivation and achieve at lower levels than students in other racial groups by the time they reach grades 6-8.

All of these findings suggest that it is much more difficult for teachers throughout the continuum from preservice to practicing teacher to engage in learner-centered practices in urban schools. When they do accomplish this, however, both they and their students benefit in terms of

less teacher stress and more job satisfaction (Krudwig, 2000) and higher student motivation and achievement (McCombs & Quiat, 2000). We are also accumulating evidence that when teachers can (a) focus on positive adult-student relationships and supportive learning environments and (b) involve students as partners in the co-creation of learning strategies, there are further positive academic and non-academic outcomes such as increased school attendance and reduced disruptive behaviors for upper elementary and middle school students at risk of alienation and school failure (Weinberger & McCombs, 2001). Of critical importance, research has demonstrated that schools with a learner-centered framework have outcomes that include (a) more positive adult-youth relationships and (b) an enhanced school climate and culture of caring (Lambert & McCombs, 1998; McCombs & Whisler, 1997).

Conclusions and Recommendations

From a learner-centered view based on research-validated principles of learning and change in complex living systems such as education, however, it is critical that new and experienced teachers understand these principles and the practices that are derived from them. Most teacher preparation and professional development programs tend to ignore extensive bodies of research regarding individual differences among students, including that on the special needs of inner-city urban children youth. Although it is vital that new and practicing teachers are experts in their content areas, a focus in the classroom on learning content to meet standards cannot be implemented in isolation from consideration of the learner's needs and concerns. All students, and urban students in particular, who find their academic work to be personally relevant are more likely to perform well within the academic environment (cf. Alexander and Murphy, 1998; Haycock, 2001). As Maslow wrote two decades ago, practices and policies must acknowledge students' physical, psychological, social, and emotional needs. Today many students report feeling disconnected from each other, think content standards are irrelevant and

not personally meaningful or challenging, and dropout mentally if not physically because they no longer want to be in a punitive and coercive learning environment or in classes where they believe the coursework is too hard and they cannot succeed. Yet we know that a caring relationship between teacher and student works to offset students' feelings of frustration with, apathy, or alienation from school (cf. McCombs, 1998).

Implications for Social and Educational Policy

A number of policy issues must be addressed to facilitate the implementation of learner-centered principles and practices in urban school reform. I will highlight those that I believe are most critical to addressing central issues and realities. My list builds on the research reviewed here and what I believe are the most serious barriers and most promising directions for implementing the Learner-Centered Framework as part of urban reform strategies.

First, policies must emphasize new leadership roles through the use of strategies that empower members of underrepresented minority groups – teachers and students alike – to take increased control over their own learning and development. For example, increased attention is needed to programs such "Generation WHY" developed by Harper (1997, 1998) that are listening to what kids have to say. Students in Grades 6-12 are involved as partners and leaders in collaboration with teachers, the local community, higher education, and corporate sponsors to assist in the restructuring of education through telecommunications. New positive relationships are formed between youth and teachers and new school cultures of mutual respect and caring have emerged. Students – many from underrepresented minority groups – who would have dropped out of school are now making plans to go on to college and/or enter high tech careers.

Second, policies must emphasize a balance in school reform efforts between a concern with high achievement of standards and a concern with meeting the individual learning and motivational needs of diverse students. This balance must be a criterion of comprehensive

school reform – particularly as we confront an increasingly alienated generation of youth and an increasingly demoralized and frustrated teacher force (McCombs & Whisler, 1997).

Third, policies must emphasize the valuing of diversity and pluralism at all levels of the educational system. They must embrace new conceptions of race and ethnicity, intellectual ability, and knowledge systems that privilege particular racial, ethnic, social class, or gender group rather than the experiences of all groups. They must also embrace new notions about learning and learners that unite people and groups, derived from research-validated principles such as those defined in the APA *Learner-Centered Psychological Principles* (1997).

Fourth, policies guiding educational reform must emphasize change strategies and processes focused on inclusive dialogue, the building of respectful relationships, and the emergence of tailor-made models that are owned by all participants rather than on mandated and/or "externally-ready" models. They must give permission for concepts presented by Wheatley (1999) relevant to living systems to be applied and researched in new and varied designs that respectfully serve the needs of particular learners and contexts.

Fifth, policies on the use of technology in our PreK-16 educational systems must narrow and not broaden the achievement gap of underrepresented minority students at all SES levels. Explicit attention must be given to the distribution of technology resources and educational opportunities such that the students themselves become part of the solution – beginning in early grades to work together among themselves and with their teachers in co-creating solutions. To this end, greater attention must be given to the power of programs such as Harper's (1998) Generation Why – in the form of commitments at local, state, and federal levels to learning and broadly implemented education about these programs.

Sixth, policies governing educational systems design must balance a concern with what is done and learning outcomes and a concern with how it is done and assumptions being made

about human nature, learning, and the capacities of individual learners. They must honor diverse talents and abilities, diverse interests and motivations, and seek to broaden rather than narrow the rich diversity of students that enter at preschool age and exit as young adults. These policies must take seriously research findings of Gardner (1995), Renzulli et al. (1995), and others that show us the value of programs based on new assumptions.

Finally, policies must value educational outcomes that go beyond academic achievement to motivational and social outcomes that include enhanced self and social identities, reduced prejudicial and "better than" thinking, and increased personal and social responsibility. This includes greater attention to those working with schools as caring learning communities such as described by Lewis and Schaps (1999) and Noddings (1995).

A Research Agenda for Next Steps

The research agenda proposed here follows from the above policy implications. It focuses on the PreK-16 educational system and on strategies that give greater voice to *all* students at all educational levels, and particularly underrepresented minority students, working together as change agents in addressing issues of greatest concern. The agenda is thus one of empowerment and shared responsibility.

- Research efforts are needed to further study principle-based learning and change in schools and districts and their impact on an expanded set of outcomes that include, but go beyond, increased learning and achievement for all students. One emphasis of this research is on a range motivational and academic student outcomes, particularly for students from the underrepresented minority groups highlighted in the Task Force report. Students from all diverse groups need to be included as research partners, working together with committed educators and researchers. The primary products co-created from this research would be (a) the identification and documentation of benefits from

principle-based, research validated changes in terms of personal, motivational, social, and academic outcomes and (b) a new vision of PreK-16 education for all learners.

- Research efforts are needed to further identify, document, and disseminate results of those principles and practices that work in different school settings and contexts. Again, diverse and inclusive groups of students need to work with researchers in these efforts. As a process and an outcome of this research, the news media, business community, and political leadership at local, state, and federal levels need to be involved in dissemination efforts. In this way, these individuals and groups can be educated about powerful, innovative, and feasible approaches for transforming ineffective educational practices.
- Research efforts are needed to better understand the processes that best support successful system change as well as personal change in attitudes that underlie the alienation and underachievement of individuals and groups in educational systems. Particular attention needs to be given to understanding the when, what, why, and how of these processes and the dynamics of relationship-building through dialogue that must be supported for effective personal and organizational change. This focus needs to be explored as in other areas by diverse and inclusive groups of students working together with adult researchers, educators, and parent and community members as appropriate. One primary product of these efforts will be an understanding of how trust is built through communication at all ages and with students from all diversity groups.
- Research efforts are needed to identify how best to scale up and expand the impact of what is learned about the best practices and processes for educational transformation. The use of existing personal and technological networks needs to be explored, with students from all diverse groups involved as partners and co-creators of the research and research issues as well as of the strategies and processes that give them a meaningful role

in implementing successful solutions. Products of these efforts will include co-created (with news media and technology experts) multi-media presentations that can help educate the public, practitioners, researchers, and policymakers about what has been learned about the process, each other, and future strategies to broaden existing networks. In this way, research products themselves contribute to the scaling up process.

- Research efforts are needed to study the processes, principles, models, and solutions that emerge as diverse people come together to define learner-centered educational systems. Shared concepts in the form of higher-order principles need to be identified – again by diverse student and adult groups working together – as a framework for understanding the nature of human learning and change in complex living systems. Processes studied need to include inspiring hope and developing faith that the right solutions will emerge when the dialogue is constructive and respectful of all voices and perspectives. The primary product to be disseminated (with news media) from these research efforts will be co-created stories that define a variety of learner-centered education models, at all levels of the system, that can in themselves be sources of hope and models for the future.

The challenges or urban reform are complex – particularly those that can link Grades pK-16 in effective teacher preparation and professional development. The use of a research-validated set of principles and practices derived from these principles gives us the advantage of passing on approaches that can maximize learning and achievement for all learners.

Even though it is unlikely that policymakers will stop mandating change and reducing external pressures anytime soon, Adelman and Walking-Eagle (1997) stress the importance of communicating research demonstrating the efficacy of reform efforts that acknowledge teachers' needs as learners. Networks and expanded relationships as support systems are also vital. Lieberman and Grolnick (1997) see these as ongoing learning tools for teachers, tools that can

foster learning and a deepening understanding of the ingredients of learning that are needed for themselves and their students – a wide array of learning opportunities, inquiry methods, access to real problems to solve, acknowledgement of the importance of building on prior experiences, and the opportunities to work with, collaborate, and be mentored by others.

Even with this attention to teacher empowerment and involvement in an ongoing process of co-creating what defines quality teachers and teaching from a research-validated and learner-centered perspective – there is perhaps still a missing piece. This piece is called "the inner edge" by Holmes-Ponder, Ponder, and Bell (1999). It addresses even more broadly the personal domain and spiritual condition of school leaders and teachers. Holmes-Ponder et al. point out that to truly transform education to allow *all learners to live and work successfully* requires that people relate differently to themselves and to each other. It also requires that we know ourselves more deeply and have a deeper connection with our purpose for living. This means we must be aware of spiritual influences and conditions that support and wear away at our sense of who we are, what we are doing, and the difference we are making in the world and in our mission to support learning for all. We must reconnect our nation's teachers with the feelings of power and spiritual joy that originally brought them to teaching and learning. From this perspective, what collaboration adds to the teacher quality debate *is a spirit of community and success* – a recognition of our collective self and what we share.

What is most needed in bringing conflicting views on how to promote teacher quality into balance is to acknowledge the *holistic needs of all people in the system.* Fullen (1997) speaks to the roles of emotion and hope during times of intense change and pressure. He suggests that in such times what is most needed is to reduce the barriers to learning and change. These include isolation, lack of empathy, not giving intuition and emotion a respected role, and supporting hope as a healthy virtue. To be effective, educational reform must be constructive and build

individual and group capacity to handle negative emotions, frustrations, and fears as well as maintain hope and the commitment to future positive possibilities. For me, that means beginning with research-validated, learner-centered principles. These principles confirm the foundation for best practice and give us permission to slow down, focus on our own and all our learners' needs, and trust each other and our knowledge of what's best to support optimal learning and development for all learners. When we can do that, we stop looking for the quick fix and begin seeing what defines quality teachers, teaching, and continuing motivation for an ongoing lifelong learning process. We balance high learning standards and quality teaching with a concern with supporting *all learners*, including those committed to children and education. We reduce rather than increase the pressures and alienation, while supporting high standards. And more importantly, I would predict that in the process we would attract and retain even more dedicated teachers of quality who are prepared to accept the challenges of urban education.

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